

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 02438 01 OF 02 230623Z
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AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION SINAI
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2438

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: LABOR PARTY BEGINS TO CRITICIZE GOVERNMENT

1. SUMMARY: THE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP SHARPLY ATTACKED
THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT
AND OF RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. IN A SERIES OF SPEECHES
AT A PARTY SYMPOSIUM ON FEBRUARY 16. RABIN WAS IN
PARTICULARLY SHARP FORM AND ACCUSED BEGIN OF "OUTMODED
CONCEPTS OF POLISH HONOR," WHILE PERES SAID
THE GOVERNMENT HAD CONTRIBUTED TO EROSION OF AMERICAN
SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL. AT A LATER MEETING OF THE PARTY'S
EXECUTIVE BUREAU, PERES SAID THE PARTY WOULD BEGIN TO
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 02438 01 OF 02 230623Z

TO SPEAK OUT MORE. THESE STATEMENTS PROBABLY WERE
PARTIALLY AN EFFORT TO RESTORE PARTY UNITY. WHILE IT
IS UNUSUAL TO SEE RABIN AND PERES CRITICIZING BEGIN
RATHER THAN EACH OTHER, THE UNITY IS MORE APPARENT
THAN REAL. THE SHARPER ATTACK ON FOREIGN POLICY
ISSUES PROBABLY DOES NOT CONSTITUTE THE START OF A
UNIFIED CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY

2. THE LABOR PARTY APPEARS TO HAVE SHARPENED ITS ATTACK ON THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. UNTIL NOW VARIOUS PARTY FIGURES HAVE LIMITED THEMSELVES TO QUESTIONING THE WISDOM OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PEACE PROPOSALS AND PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S TACTICS IN HIS DEALINGS WITH SADAT AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. BUT SPEECHES BY PARTY LEADERS AT A LABOR SYMPOSIUM ON FEBRUARY 16 AND AN ANNOUNCEMENT BY PARTY CHAIRMAN SHIMON PERES AT A MEETING OF THE PARTY EXECUTIVE ON FEBRUARY 19 APPEARED TO INDICATE THAT THE PARTY LEADERSHIP INTENDS TO ARTICULATE A UNIFIED PARTY STAND AND A COMPREHENSIVE AND CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE NEGOTIATING POSITIONS AND UNDERLYING CONCEPTIONS OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT.

3. AT THE SYMPOSIUM, LABOR LEADERS RABIN, PERES AND EBAN DELIVERED SPEECHES SHARPLY CRITICAL OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. FORMER PRIME MINISTER RABIN DERIDED BEGIN'S "OUTDATED CONCEPTS OF POLISH HONOR (WHICH) DO NOT HOLD IN POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS." HE ASSERTED THAT BEGIN HAD CONDUCTED THE NEGOTIATIONS BACKWARD BY PRESENTING HIS FINAL PLANS AT THE OUTSET AND DEMANDING THAT THEY BE ACCEPTED OR NO NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE POSSIBLE. IF THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE FROM SADAT, HE ASKED, HOW CAN BEGIN CLAIM IT TO BE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 02438 01 OF 02 230623Z

HIS RIGHT? RABIN WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE SINAI PROPOSAL WAS BASICALLY FLAWED. THE OFFER OF TOTAL WITHDRAWAL AND COMPLETE EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY IS "THE ROGERS PLAN MINUS;" AT LEAST UNDER THE ROGERS FORMULA ISRAELI PRESENCE WAS ASSURED AT SHARM-EL-SHEIKH. "I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL THOUGHT THAT ANYONE COULD BUY THIS IDEA," RABIN SAID, REFERRING TO BEGIN'S PROPOSAL TO RETAIN ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI UNDER EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY. THE ATTEMPTS TO SUPPORT ISRAELI CLAIMS BY REFERRING TO INTERNATIONAL LAW ARE CHILDISH AND ARE NOT APPLICABLE TO SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AMONG NATIONS, RABIN DECLARED.

4. THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER ALSO CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT FOR UNDERMINING ISRAEL'S CREDIBILITY IN A WAY THAT NO OTHER ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAS DONE IN THE PAST, BY ENGAGING IN SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY DURING NEGOTIATIONS. "ISRAELI HONOR HAS NOT BEEN ENHANCED IN AMERICAN EYES FOLLOWING THIS REIDCULOUS SIBTERFUGE. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO RESPECT A GOVERNMENT THAT ENGAGES IN SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY UNDER BOTH SECURITY AND AREHEOLOGICAL GUISES?" REGARDING RELATIONS WITH

THE U.S., RABIN ASSERTED THAT IF BEGIN WOULD HAVE BOTHERED TO ACQUAINT HIMSELF WITH THE NUANCES OF AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE, HE COULD HAVE PREVENTED SOME OF THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHICH OCCURRED. "IF BEGIN TAKES PRIDE IN AMERICAN SUPPORT IT SHOULD NOT COME AS A SURPRISE THAT SADAT WOULD WANT TO ACHIEVE WITH CARTER EXACTLY WHAT BEGIN THOUGHT HE GOT. IT IS AN ILLUSION TO EXPECT A NEUTRAL (AMERICAN) POSITION. THE U.S. HAS INTERESTS. ONE MUST VERIFY WHAT IS SAID WITH THEM AND NOT GLORY IN ACCOMPLISHMENTS NOT YET ACHIEVED NOR BE SURPRISED WHEN THERE IS UNDERSTANDING ALSO WITH THE OTHER SIDE."

5. PERES ALSO ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT'S SETTLEMENT
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 TEL AV 02438 01 OF 02 230623Z

POLICY, PARTICULARLY THE TIMING OF THE RAFAH SETTLEMENT INITIATIVE. HE DECLARED THAT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN HAD SUGARCOATED THE REALITY OF THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR MONTHS AND IN SO DOING DAMAGED SADAT'S POSITION. UNBRIDLED GOVERNMENT OPTIMISM ALSO LED TO THE SERIES OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHICH HAS ERODED AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE ISRAELI POSITION. PERES WARNED THAT THE PARTY MUST ADOPT POSITIONS BASED ON NATIONAL AS OPPOSED TO PARTISAN EVALUATIONS. THE CARTER FORMULA FOR THE WEST BANK, PERES SAID, COULD SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HER ARAB NEIGHBORS. "IF WE WERE IN POWER WE COULD CONSTRUCT AN AGREEMENT BASED ON IT." OTHER SPEAKERS, INCLUDING ABBA EBAN AND FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SHLOMO AVINERI, ALSO CRITICIZED IN HARSH TERMS BEGIN'S HANDLING OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. AVINERI FOLLOWED UP HIS REMARKS WITH A HARD-HITTING JERUSALEM POST ARTICLE AND A LENGTHY RADIO INTERVIEW.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 02438 02 OF 02 230713Z
ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2438

6. RABIN ELABORATED ON THE ABOVE REMARKS IN A LENGTHY CONVERSATION WITH THE DCM ON FEBRUARY 18. HE UNEQUIVOCALLY STATED THAT IN HIS MIND AND IN THE VIEW OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, THE WITHDRAWAL PROVISIONS OF RESOLUTION 242 HAD APPLIED TO ALL THREE FRONTS. HE EMPHATICALLY DISMISSED BEGIN'S STRATEGY OF OFFERING RETURN OF ALL OF THE SINAI AT THE ONSET OF NEGOTIATIONS, A TACTIC WHICH DEMONSTRATED NO UNDERSTANDING OF ARAB PSYCHOLOGY. WHILE NOT FORTHCOMING ON HOW TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION OF THE RAFAH SETTLEMENTS, RABIN IMPLIED THAT HE WOULD NOT BE NECESSARILY AVERSE TO AN OFFER OF TERRITORIAL EXCHANGE. RABIN IS NOT IDEOLOGICALLY HUNG UP OVER THE SETTLEMENT QUESTION AND IN HIS VIEW
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 02438 02 OF 02 230713Z

THE AIR BASE ISSUE, WHILE IMPORTANT FOR SECURITY REASONS, COULD BE RESOLVED BY RETAINING AT LEAST THE ETZION AIRFIELD FOR AN UNSPECIFIED PERIOD.

7. REGARDING THE WEST BANK, RABIN ARGUES THAT ISRAEL SHOULD BE MORE ACTIVE IN ENTICING HUSSEIN INTO THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND SHOULD NOT TOTALLY RELY ON AMERICAN EFFORTS. RABIN TAKES A RATHER SANGUINE VIEW OF THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF ARMS SALES TO EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA, RECALLING THAT DR. KISSINGER HAD LONG AGO FOREWARNED THAT AN EVENTUAL U.S.-EGYPTIAN ARMS RELATIONSHIP WAS THE INEVITABLE PRICE THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE PAID FOR WEANING SADAT AWAY FROM THE SOVIETS. EGYPTIAN F5S ARE CLEARLY NOT A THREAT TO ISRAELI SECURITY AND IT WILL BE YEARS

BEFORE SAUDI ARABIA CAN PUT ITS F15S TO EFFECTIVE USE.
THE ISRAELI PUBLIC, IN RABIN'S VIEW, IS NOT YET
WILLING TO GIVE UP ITS HOPES FOR PEACE, BUT IN THE
ABSENCE OF LEADERSHIP A REVERSION TO THE SEIGE MENTALITY
WHICH PREVAILED BEFORE SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM CAN
BE EXPECTED. ONLY FIRM AND HONEST LEADERSHIP CAN
AVERT THIS. RABIN ASSERTS THAT PERES IS EAGER TO
ENTER A NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT. THIS, IN HIS VIEW,
WOULD MAKE NO POLITICAL SENSE NOR WOULD IT APPRECIABLY
AUGMENT LABOR INFLUENCE ON GOVERNMENT POLICY.

8. COMMENT: RABIN WAS UNUSUALLY VOLUBLE AND GAVE THE
UMPRESSION OF SOMEONE WHO HAS COME TO TERMS WITH THE
FACT THAT HE PROBABLY WILL NOT REGAIN THE PREMIERSHIP AND HAS
THEREFORE DECIDED TO FILL THE ROLE OF A FORTHRIGHT
AND VOCAL ANALYST, UNINHIBITED BY POLITICAL CON-
SIDERATIONS. END COMMENT

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 02438 02 OF 02 230713Z

9. IN HIS STATEMENT AT THE MEETING OF THE LABOR PARTY
EXECUTIVE ON FEBRUARY 19, PERES ANNOUNCED THAT HENCE-
FORTH LABOR WOULD SPEAK OUT PUBLICLY ON THE ISSUES OF
THE DAY. PERES DECLARED THAT A COMPROMISE CAN BE
REACHED BETWEEN THE OPENING POSITION OF EGYPT AND
THAT OF THE ALIGNMENT, WHEREAS THE LIKUD CLAIM TO A
SOVERIEGNTY OVER JUDEA AND SAMARIA PRECLUDES ANY
AGREEMENT ON THE WEST BANK. A PEACE SETTLEMENT IN
EGYPT, HE EMPHASIZED, IS POSSIBLE; A SOLUTION TO THE
PROBLEMS OF THE AIR FIELDS AND SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI
CAN BE VOUND.

10. COMMENT: FROM THESE STATEMENTS IT WOULD APPEAR THAT
THE LABOR PARTY HAS CONCLUDED THAT THE TIME IS NOW
RIPE FOR ASSUMING THE KIND OF OPPOSITION ROLE WHICH
IT HAD BEEN UNABLE TO UNWILLING TO ADOPT PREVIOUSLY
FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS: THE BEGIN PEACE PLAN CAUGHT
EVERYONE BY SURPRISE AND, WHILE LABOR WAS OPPOSED
TO CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSALS, IT WAS INHIBITED
FROM MOUNTING AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION BECAUSE IT
FEARED DOING ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT IN ANY WAS DIMINISH
CHANCES FOR PEACE. TACTICALLY IT FELT IT WOULD
NOT AFFORD TO TAKE A NEGATIVE STANCE AT A TIME WHEN
THE PROSPECT OF PEACE HAD SO CAPTURED THE PUBLIC
IMAGINATION. IN ADDITION, IT HAS TAKEN SEVERAL MONTHS
FOR THE PARTY TO DEVELOP A UNIFIED POSITION ON THE
BASIC ISSUES. NOW THAT NEGOTIATIONS APPEAR TO BE
TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED, THE ARGUMENT THAT LABOR SHOULD
REFRAIN FROM CRITISISM IS LESS VALID. THE PARTY HAS
DETERMINED THAT IT CANNOT BE SERIOUSLY HARMED BY

MOUNTING A CAMPAIGN OF VOCAL OPPOSITION. THE FOUR LEADING FIGURES IN THE PARTY (PERES, RABIN, ALLON AND EBAN) ARE IN FULL AGREEMENT THAT: 1. THERE IS NO CHANCE FOR AN AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT WITHOUT A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE ON THE WEST BANK; 2. HUSSEIN MUST BE GIVEN MORE COMPELLING REASONS TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS;
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PAGE 04 TEL AV 02438 02 OF 02 230713Z

AND 3. THE BEGIN PLAN FOR EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI IS A NON-STARTER.

11. OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH SEVERAL PARTY MEMBERS AND JOURNALISTS LEAD US TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THESE RECENT STATEMENTS DO NOT CONSTITUTE A CONCERTED LABOR PARTY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY NOR DO THEY INDICATE A RENEWED SENSE OF PARTY UNITY, ALTHOUGH ELEMENTS OF EACH OF THESE FACTORS EXIST: THEY ARE A DEMONSTRATION OF A UNITY OF SORTS; THERE HAD BEEN SOME CONCERN BEFORE THE SYMPOSIUM THAT RABIN WOULD ATTACK PERES RATHER THAN BEGIN AND THERE WAS RELIEF IN THE PARTY THAT A COMMON TARGET WAS HIT. THEY ALSO SHOW THAT LABOR IS NOT MORE PREPARED THAN IT WAS IN THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS TO ATTACK BEGIN ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. THE IMPETUS FOR SUCH CRITICISM MAY STEM FROM THE PERES/SADAT MEETING AND THE CONVICTION ARISING FROM THAT MEETING THAT IF LABOR WERE IN POWER, IT WOULD DO A BETTER JOB OF NEGOTIATING. WE WOULD ANTICIPATE THAT LABOR WILL STILL REFRAIN FROM ANY KIND OF ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN UNTIL AFTER BEGIN RETURNS FROM WASHINGTON.
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